

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 8799

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, EG
SUBJECT: KHADDAM DISCUSSES SYRO-EYGPITIAN UNITY

1. SUMMARY.

KHADDAM FORESEES ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEES TO STUDY SYRO-EGYPTIAN UNITY WITHIN FEW WEEKS AND COMPLETION OF THEIR WORK WITHIN SIX MONTHS. DEGREE OF SYRO-EGYPTIAN UNITY WILL BE SOMETHING LESS THAN THAT INTENDED FOR SYRIA AND JORDAN BUT FAR MORE THAN HAS EVERY DEVELOPED IN THE CONFEDERATION OF ARAB REPUBLICS. GENEVA CANNOT CONVENE IN FONMIN'S OPINION BEFORE ISRAELI ELECTIONS AND FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT IN ISRAEL. END SUMMARY

2. CALLED ON KHADDAM AT HIS APARTMENT DECEMBER 24 FOR FIRST TIME SINCE I HAD VISITED HIM IN HOSPITAL FOLLOWING ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE. HE OBVIOUSLY STILL IN CONSIDERABLE PAIN; SAID THAT WHILE HIS WOUNDS LARGELY HEALED THERE HAD BEEN NERVE DAMAGE IN HIS ARM AND UPPER CHEST WHICH WOULD TAKE A FEW MORE WEEKS TO HEAL. NOTED
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THAT WHILE HIS ACTUAL ASSAILANTS HAD NOT YET BEEN CAUGHT, ABOUT 20 OF THE GROUP WHICH HAD PLANNED ATTACK ON HIM WERE NOW ARRESTED. ALL WERE SYRIANS OF "IRAQI PERSUASION" AND HAD BEEN BEHIND EARLIER ATTACK ON DEPSEC GEN OF BAATH PARTY AL-AHMAR.

3. REFERRING TO HIS CAIRO VISIT, I SAID TO KHADDAM THAT AMERICAN

READERS OF THE CAIRO COMMUNIQUE AND DECLARATION WERE BOUND TO FIND CERTAIN PHRASES BOTH INTRIGUING AND CONFUSING. COULD HE DEFINE FOR ME WITH MORE PRECISION WHAT SYRIA AND EGYPT HOPED TO ACHIEVE IN TERMS OF UNITY AND IF POSSIBLE GIVE SOME IDEA OF THE TIME FRAME INTENDED? KHADDAM REPLIED THAT WE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT THE SYRIANS SERIOUSLY INTEND TO WORK TOWARDS FORM OF UNITY WITH EGYPTIANS. THIS WOULD NOT BE A HURRIED AFFAIR: NEITHER PARTY HAD FORGOTTEN THE BAD EXPERIENCES OF 1958-61. HE ANTICIPATED THAT THE SEVERAL COMMITTEES, LISTED IN THE COMMUNIQUE TO STUDY SPECIFIC ISSUES RANGING FROM THE CONSTITUTIONAL TO THE FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF UNITY, WOULD BE NAMED IN A FEW WEEKS. THOSE STUDIES, HE EXPECTED, WOULD BE COMPLETED IN ABOUT SIX MONTHS.

4. IT WAS TOO EARLY HE CONTINUED, TO STATE HOW FAR THE TWO COUNTRIES WOULD EVENTUALLY MOVE TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER. IT WAS "MORE THAN A QUESTION OF CLOSER COORDINATION BUT IT WILL IN ANY EVENT BE LESS THAN THE ARRANGEMENTS WE PLAN WITH JORDAN, WHERE BOTH OF US ARE SEEKING ONE UNIFIED STATE." AT THE SAME TIME, IT WOULD BE FAR MORE THAN HAD EVER DEVELOPED IN THE CONFEDERATION OF ARAB REPUBLICS (SYRIA, EGYPT AND LIBYA). THAT ORGANIZATION "IS ASLEEP".

5. SAID I HAD BEEN STRUCK BY THE COMMUNIQUE'S AFFIRMATION THAT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE MUST CONVENE NO LATER THAN MARCH. KHADDAM SAID WE SHOULD NOT TAKE THIS LITERALLY. OBVIOUSLY IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO CONVENE GENEVA BEFORE THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS. THEN WHY, I ASKED, HAD THEY MADE SUCH A POINT OF THE DATE IN THE COMMUNIQUE? HE SHRUGGED, NOTING THAT AFTER ALL THIS DATE HAD RECENTLY BEEN ASSERTED AS ESSENTIAL BY THE UNGA. BOTH CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTIES IN CAIRO FELT THEY COULD SAY NO LESS THAN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAD.

6. ASKED IF HE ANTICIPATED EARLY CONTACTS WITH THE USG CONCERNING THE NEXT STAGE IN THE PEACE PROCESS. KHADDAM REPLIED THAT BOTH SYRIA AND EGYPT INTENDED TO GIVE THE NEW AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION A CHANCE TO ORGANIZE ITSELF AND STUDY THE MIDDLE PROBLEM IN DEPTH.

7. ISRAELI POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

I NOTED THE SYRIAN PRESS HAD PUBLISHED SEVERAL ARTICLES INTERPRETING RABIN'S RESIGNATION AS A MANEUVER TO BLOCK ARAB PEACE INITIATIVES. KHADDAM REPLIED THAT HE INTERPRETED THE RESIGNATION AND PREPARATION FOR NEW ELECTIONS AS CAUSED PURELY BY DOMESTIC ISRAELI POLITICS AND DISASSOCIATED HIMSELF FROM THE PRESS SPECULATION. HE REPEATED THAT OBVIOUSLY GENEVA MUST AWAIT THE RESULTS OF ISRAELI ELECTIONS AND FORMATION OF ITS NEW GOVERNMENT. HE GAVE NO INDICATION THIS

TIMING WOULD CAUSE SYRIA ANY PARTICULAR PROBLEMS.

8. IN CONCLUSION, KHADDAM SAID THAT 1977 WOULD BE A YEAR OF MANY "POSSIBILITIES." HE WAS LOOKING FORWARD, AS HE KNEW EGYPT DID AS WELL, TO CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE U.S. IN SEARCH FOR PEACE.

9. COMMENT:

ASIDE FROM HIS ASSERTION THAT SYRIA AND JORDAN WERE BOTH LOOKING FOR "ONE UNIFIED STATE," I FOUND MOST STRIKING THE CALMNESS WITH WHICH THE FONMIN DESCRIBED SYRIA'S STATE OF MIND AS IT CONTEMPLATES THE COMING YEAR.
MURPHY

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